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C O N F I D E N T I A L BRATISLAVA 000677

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PINR](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: MINISTER RUSKO'S WILD RIDE

REF: A. BRATISLAVA 618

[1](#)B. BRATISLAVA 626

[1](#)C. BRATISLAVA 663

Classified By: DCM Lawrence R. Silverman for Reasons 1.4(B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (C) Following the Christian Democratic Party (KDH) announcement last week that it would leave the coalition if Minister of the Economy Pavol Rusko was not removed from office by August 23 (Ref C), Rusko's ANO party closeted itself August 22 to determine next steps. In Bratislava, the only thing pundits can agree on is that, by the time the smoke clears later this week, the coalition government will still stand, with or without ANO. Based upon our conversations with political operatives, journalists, analysts, and party insiders, we believe that ANO itself will ask Rusko to step down, avoiding a "firing" by the Prime Minister. However, as we enter the final 24 hours before the coalition announces its decision, Rusko -- as ever -- remains the wild card; as one contact observed in the past, "when Rusko gets backed into a corner, he doubles his bets."

RUSKO'S PARTY WANTS HIM TO GO QUIETLY...

[1](#)2. (C) Independent political analysts, as well as some ANO party members, are suggesting that Rusko "face the music" and step down from his ministerial post, preserving it for his ANO party. As some speculated that Rusko would elevate ANO MP Jirko Malcharek to replace him as Minister (while Rusko continued to call the shots from behind the scenes), a nervous Malcharek appeared on television today to say that he thinks Rusko should step down. Malcharek added that several other (unnamed) ANO leaders agree with him. Some say that swapping Rusko for another ANO MP is the "best case scenario" for ANO and the coalition, as replacing Rusko with an MP from another coalition party would upset the balance of the cabinet and could result in additional political fallout. However, while this would appease the current situation, Rusko's continued leadership of ANO would still cause problems for KDH.

...BUT IT'S NOT IN RUSKO'S NATURE

[1](#)3. (C) Rusko's ego, however, could still get in the way. As one advisor to Smer leader Robert Fico told us, Rusko remains "like a bullet; you never know which way he is going to fire." If Rusko refuses to resign, the media reports that Prime Minister Dzurinda would probably remove him. While some of our interlocutors speculate that Rusko may try to take others down with him (particularly by revealing evidence or allegations of corruption), others note that "whipping out the little black book" is not a popular option in Slovakia.

[1](#)4. (C) The Prime Minister may seek to replace Rusko with an independent official to avoid intra-coalition conflicts. A popular suggestion is former ANO MP and former Minister of the Economy Robert Nemcsics, who was forced out by Rusko after criticizing him publicly for "party management problems." Nemcsics, who Rusko's own former campaign manager told us is "the only smart guy in the party," has the experience to lead the Ministry.

AND WHAT OF ANO?

[1](#)5. (C) The question as to whether ANO will implode is the subject of much speculation, especially in the event that Rusko goes down swinging. In many ways ANO cannot exist without Rusko (the party's founder, leader, and financier) and the favorable media coverage provided by Rusko's Markiza television station. However, others suggest that an ugly scene by Rusko could provide the party with ample reason to split. ANO club president Lubomir Lintner and Minister of Culture Frantisek Toth have both been rumored to be on the outs with Rusko, and possible defectors to other parties or the independent ranks. One source close to Minister of the Interior Vladimir Palko said that KDH believes that Lintner and Minister of Health Rudolf Zajac would both consider spots with KDH, and that they hope Toth would leave ANO if it continues under Rusko's leadership. If Prime Minister

Dzurinda were able to convince other ANO Ministers to remain in the cabinet despite Rusko's removal, it would attest to his finely-honed skills at keeping this coalition together until the elections next year.  
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